

# SONGS OF THE OLD SOUTH

HOWARD WEEDEN

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# Songs of the Old South







# Songs of the Old South

Verses and Drawings by

## Howard Weeden

Author of "Bandanna Ballads" and "Shadows on the Wall"

"*I'll south with the sun and keep my clime*"

SIDNEY LANIER

NEW YORK  
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1900

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DEDICATED  
TO  
THE ONE MOST DEAR





## Prefatory Note

THESE modest songs and pictures, snatched from the fading remnant of a people now nearly passed away, are only valuable because the Past is always precious, and only

“—beautiful for being old and gone.”



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WHEN THE ANGELS CALL



## When the Angels Call

“ Mammy, dear Mammy, what do you see  
When you lift such wistful eyes ? ”

“ Faces, my chile, of dem dat are gone  
Who smile at me out of de skies.”

“ Mammy, dear Mammy, what do you hear  
When you look so far away ? ”

“ Voices biddin’ me come, my chile,  
To Heaven, to rest an’ stay :

“ An’ Mammy would gladly go to dat rest  
When de angels beckon so —

But who would pillow her baby’s hade  
If baby’s Mammy should go ! ”



## OLD WATT AND THE RABBITS

## Old Watt and the Rabbits

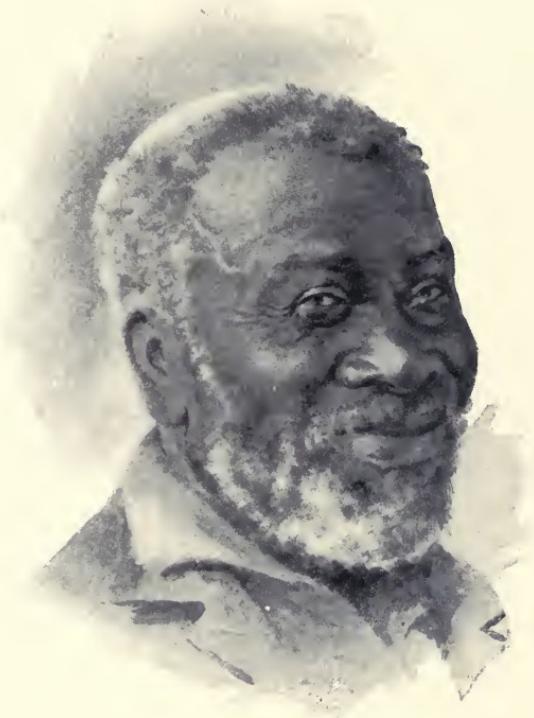
Dat thing of rabbits havin' sense  
Like other folks, is gospel true:  
I've heard it tole by dem dat knows  
An' 'sides of dat I've seen it too;

One night I come home thro' de woods  
An' in a clearin' 'mungst de oaks,  
I saw some rabbits havin' church  
As pompous as de bes' of folks:

Dey give experience, an' dey sung,  
An' den dey 'zorted, an' den prayed,  
An' everything was done de way  
Dat other sinners' church is made:

An' while one preached de others slept  
As sensible as we all do;  
An' den, de meetin' havin' broke,  
Dey went like us, home two an' two.

An' when dey 'gin to pint an' talk  
'Bout one another mean, why *den*  
I says, says I, dem rabbits sho'  
Got sense de same as men!





LEFT BEHIND

## Left Behind

When my ole Master took down sick  
I nussed him till he died,  
An' many a pleasant day we had —  
Me sittin' by his side.

We talked about de ole, ole times,  
Part fun, an' part de truth,  
But mostly Master mused on Her,  
De Mistis' of our youth :

She was so bright an' quick, he said,  
She even died dat way —  
An' went before *him* forty years  
A-smilin' — swif' an' gay:

“ But you slow cuss,” he said to me,  
“ You always *was* behin’!  
“ Come on!” an’ wid dat word he went —  
An’ lef’ his hand in mine!





# SILENT STRINGS

## Silent Strings

For all dat it hangs so silent now,  
Dis banjo once was gay,  
An' it wove de dreams dat I had of her  
Into chunes as sweet as May.

An' often I thought that its quiverin' strings  
Must be of myse'f a part—  
Else how could dey tingle an' thrill as dey did  
If her shadow but fell on my heart!

But de dreams an' de chunes has bof passed away  
An' nothin' is lef' for to tell her:  
De banjo she likes bes' to listen to now  
Is played by a happier feller!





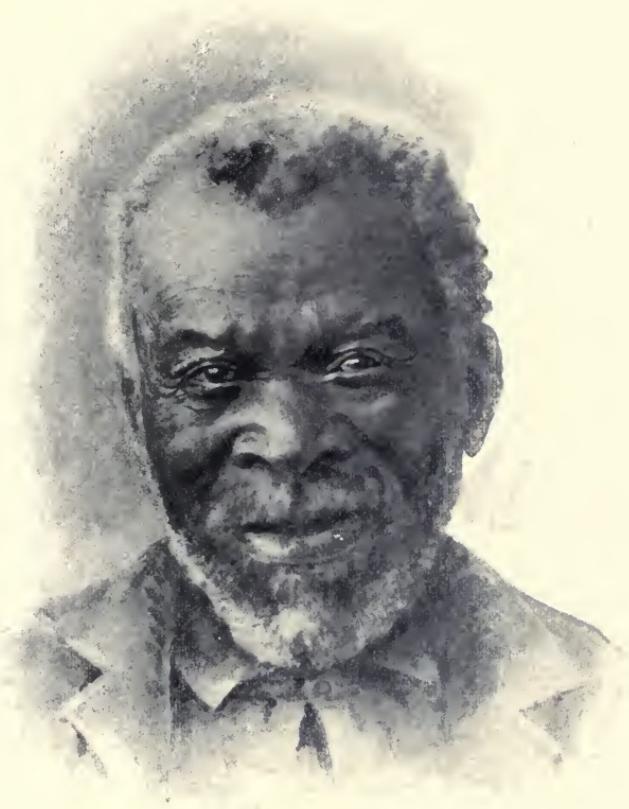
## A TOAST

## A Toast

Whenever you want a drink dat shall mean  
De best in de way of water,  
Jes' manage to take it out of a gode  
An' den hit will taste like hit oughter.

No matter de place, hit will put you at home  
As if you an' godes was kin,  
An' you know you can't feel as friendly as dat  
Wid a citified dipper of tin !

You can drink to de fields, you can drink to  
de crops —  
You can drink to your work an' your load —  
You can drink to everything simple an' true,  
When you drinks fum a country gode !





AT EASE

## At Ease

I tried to live in town, but oh !  
De town was swif' an' I was slow,  
So back I came to de cotton-rows  
An' one ole mule I'm sure I knows.

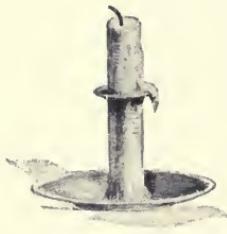
He don't expect no more of me,  
Thank God, den I expects of he ;  
An' I don't 'spect no more of he  
Den likewise he expects of me.

So I don't feel ashamed no mo'  
Of bein' black an' mean an' slow,  
Because you see dis ole mule Jeff  
Knows 'zactly how it is his sef' !





THE SONG OF THE WATCHER



### The Song of the Watcher

A small moon hangs in de mornin' sky,  
A chile is come wid de dawnin':  
De soul of de Mother takes its flight  
Early in de mornin':

De baby hastens into de worl'  
Eager to meet de dawnin';  
But de soul dat *knows*—it speeds to its Rest  
Early in de mornin'!





# DANCING IN THE SUN

## Dancing in the Sun

A small brown ragged shadowy boy,  
A silhouette of fun,  
And a shadow as ragged and slim as himself  
A-dancing in the sun ;

It is hard to tell the shadows apart  
So into each other they run,  
As dark and elusive they melt and they whirl  
And mix — as they dance in the sun.

No matter what falls to the rest of the world  
No matter what's done or undone —  
So the day be but idle and long enough  
For dancing in the sun !





## A SONG

## A Song

River, roll away from me  
An' steal as you pass de cane  
A whisperin' sigh — to lose it again  
When you reach de shinin' sea.

River, roll away from me  
Through banks of jessamine sweet,  
An' bear de odorous breaft till you meet  
An' give it away to de sea.

Sighs an' sweets you may give to de sea ;  
I only ask dat de notes  
Of dis song of Love dat softly floats  
You will bear to Her — from me !





HUSH

## Hush

In the place where they make all the drowsy  
things

Like Sleep, and Dreams, and the rest,  
It is said that the drowsiest thing that is made  
Is a Mammy's deep dark breast.

It is deep so that Life shall have one hiding-place  
Where its fret and its noises may cease;  
And dark that the light of the garish day  
May have its one shadow of peace.

And the angels who come down to watch over  
sleep  
Look first for these sheltering nests,  
And give the most beautiful dreams that they  
bring  
To the babes on the darkest breasts.





NOCTURN

## Nocturn

When de weary day in de fields is done,  
An' you plods todes home at night,  
De light dat you sees in your cabin-door  
Is sweet as a heabenal sight,

An' it glows through de glimmerin' purple  
dusk  
Wid a light dat is tender an' true,  
When you know dat it's busy cookin' for you  
A handsome 'possum-stew!





MULLEN

## Mullen

You may say all you will of what doctors kin do  
Wid deir 'scriptions an' dat sort of talk,  
But if you is sick an' wants to be cured,  
Jis' git you a good mullen stalk!

De mullen don't need fer to feel of your pulse,  
Nor to ask about how do you do:  
De tea when you 've swallowed hit knows where  
to go  
'Dout askin' no questions of you.

Of course dere are things even mullen can't do  
Like makin' a fool-nigger smart,  
An' dey say dat de strongest dose ever took,  
Never cured a achin' heart.

But for natchel, old-fashioned, an' everyday  
pains  
Like sensible folks do have,  
Jis' take a good swallow of she-mullen tea  
An' tech up wid she-mullen salve !





OLD MIS'

## Old Mis'

You never knowed Ole Mis', you say?

Well, dat's a pity, shore;  
De sort of Quality she was

Is gone — to come no more.

Her gracious word was like a Queen's,

So kine an' yet so strong;  
We all kep' time to her sof' speech  
Like marchin' to a song.

A nigger didn't dare to die

Nor marry on our place  
Widout she give her blessin' an'  
Her 'pinion on de case;

She knowed more den de doctors, 'case

God tole her what to give;  
She knowed more den de preachers, 'case  
God tole her how to live.

Dat ole plantation hit was run

On 'rangements 'bout like dis:  
De place hit b'lioned to Master, but  
Ole Master b'lioned to Mis'!





'WAY DOWN SOUTH

## 'Way Down South

An azure sky—a warm brown face—  
Soft black eyes and a dazzling mouth—  
A red bandanna, touched with gold—  
And this is the color—'way down South.

A bird that plays on a mocking flute—  
A melting drawl from a smiling mouth—  
A tinkling banjo hid in the shade—  
And this is the music, 'way down South.





SITTING IN THE SUN

## Sitting in the Sun

Long time I wandered far from home,  
But now my travelling's done —  
I'm 'way down South once more — once more  
An' sittin' in de sun.

It warms my cold old blood again  
An' brings back youth an' fun,  
An' I jes' dozes — sleeps — an' dreams  
A-sittin' in de sun.

De warm wind brings de scents I knew  
When life was jes' begun,  
An' faces dat I early loved  
Smile at me in de sun.

An' some day when de sleep is sound,  
My soul will slip an' run  
From dis ole Self dat sits an' smiles  
So quiet in de sun!





WHEN MANNERS WERE IN BLOOM

## When Manners were in Bloom

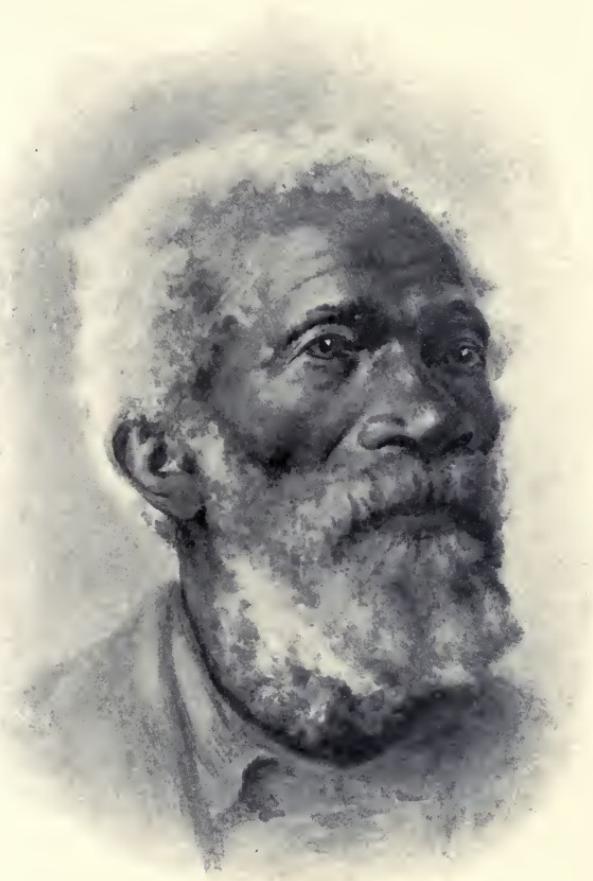
You say you would paint my manners too  
Along wid my head, — if you could ;  
Well, you should have lived in olden times  
When manners was really good !

De days was sweet an' warm an' long,  
Wid plenty of time to be kine,  
An' every one smiled an' bowed an' scraped,  
An' every one did it fine !

I seem to smell de locust flower  
Heavy after rain —  
An' de ghostly scent of mimosa blooms  
Comes blowin' back again ;

An' I feels de fine ole mannerly times  
Mix wid de scents till I seem  
To see ole Master as natchel as life —  
Bow in a kin' of dream :

His manners was certainly quality ways,  
De finest dat ever I see ;  
Dough folks used to laugh an' say dat he took  
Dem gilt-edged ways from me !





LONG AGO

## Long Ago

Brightes' heavens used to smile  
    Blue an' low,  
Softes' breezes used to sigh,  
    Long Ago!

Reddest roses used to bend,  
    Blush, an' blow,  
Faires' mornings used to dawn,  
    Long Ago!

Sweetes' smile of all the smiles  
    I used to know,  
Made de worl' like dat for me  
    Long Ago!





# THE WORST OF WAR

## The Worst of War

When my young master went to war  
    He carried me wid him too,  
An' dough I never fired a shot  
    Dere was plenty else to do.

*He* wore de sword an' buttons an' spurs,  
    An' none was so brave as he;  
But never so hard a thing did he do  
    As the thing he lef' for me.

Where a storm of leaden hail fell thick  
    He got a ball in his heart  
An' died wid a happy smile on his face—  
    But mine was de harder part:

I led his horse back home where dey sat  
    Expectin' *him* — an' I saw  
Mistis' an' Master's hearts when dey broke—  
    An' dat was de worst of war!





**RESTING**

## Resting

No — slavery wasn't bad enough  
To make my memory fret,  
'Twas only dat I was so drove  
I ain't got rested yet.

So when I hears you talk of heaben  
An' wings — an' flyin' 'round —  
I sighs an' says, " If hit suits God,  
I'll take heaben sittin' down ! "





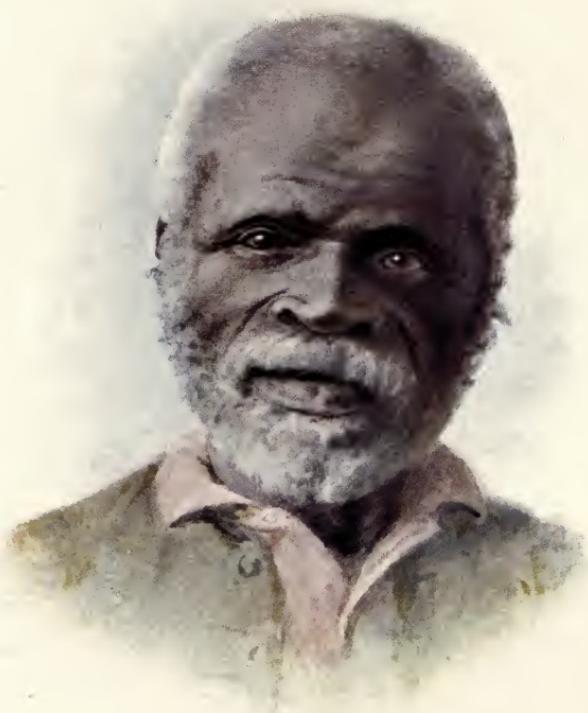
HARD WORKED

## Hard Worked

“ Old man with the sweet, black, patient face,  
Pray tell me about your life ;  
It has had its many griefs, I’m sure,  
And its noble work and strife.”

“ Yes, sir, dat’s right : in slavery times  
My business used to be  
To hunt ole Master’s specks, an’ dat  
Did shorely pester me ;

“ Since Freedom come I’ve had a load  
Of politics to tote ;  
For if you does it right, it takes  
All of your strenk to vote ! ”





## THE COTTON BLOOM

## The Cotton Bloom

The rose has a thousand lovers because  
    Of her delicate grace and perfume,  
But lovers for studier reasons give  
    Their hearts to the cotton bloom :

It grows in a dazzling ample land  
    Of measureless breadth and room —  
And the wealth of a splendid tropical sun  
    Dowers this cotton bloom.

And Capital keeps his eyes on the field  
    While he hears the hum of the loom,  
And his anxious visage glows and pales  
    At the nod of the cotton bloom !





AT LAST

## At Last

De road is grown so rough an' dark  
I tries no more to roam —  
I'm standin' tired by de way  
Fer God to lead me Home.

De friends I knew are gone, an' none  
Are lef' to understan',  
But God, who loves an' understan's,  
He holds me by de han'.

A lonely Peace is come at las' —  
An' now I waitin' see  
De hinderin' things all fall away  
An' leave jes' God an' me!





# THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

## The Arabian Nights

When life was young an idle rhyme  
Could charm the happy time,  
And Mammy gave us, with a kiss,  
A song that went like this:  
“ De Squirrel has a bushy tail,  
De ’Possum’s tail am bare,  
De Raccoon’s tail am ringed all ’round,  
De old Hare’s tail aint dere.”

Our Mammy was the wit and sage  
Of all that golden age:  
And when she sung a song like this  
She steeped the night in bliss:  
“ De Squirrel has a bushy tail,  
De ’Possum’s tail am bare,  
De Raccoon’s tail am ringed all ’round,  
De ole Hare’s tail aint dere ! ” \*

\* The old friend, upon whose memory the author draws for much that is in this book, listens backward seventy years, and hears this song.





## FROST WORK

## Frost Work

When plenty ripe persimmons make  
A 'Possum hunt jis' right,  
An' frost has teched your spirits till  
Dey's feelin' kind o' light,  
'Tis time to take your banjo down  
Fum off the cabin wall  
An' weave a little song in praise  
Of 'Possum-time an' fall !

When evenin' fires softly throw  
Your tremblin' shadow tall  
To meet an' kiss Her shadow as  
It beckons on de wall —  
'Tis time to take your banjo down  
An' make de music stir  
Wid weavin' happy songs in praise  
Of 'Possum-time an' Her !











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